Hsin - Hsin Ming



Seng-ts'an
Third Patriarch of Zen

Hsin-Hsin Ming

Verses on the Perfect Mind

by

Seng-ts'an

Third Patriarch of Zen

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Note of Special Thanks

Many thanks for the great translation efforts of so many. Without their efforts, I would not have been able to read this marvelous book nor make my own interpretation.

This interpretation was created by studying and comparing translations by Richard B. Clarke, Dusan Pajin, D.T. Suzuki, R.H. Blyth, Robert F. Olson, Christmas Humphreys, and Stanley Lombardo...and my own understanding and realization.

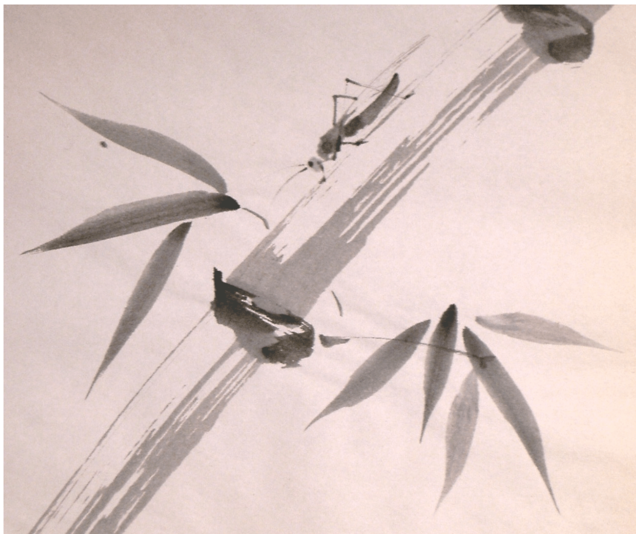


Introduction by Eric Putkonen

The Hsin Hsin Ming (Shinjinmei in Japanese) is a verse attributed to the Third Chinese Chan (Zen) Patriarch Seng'tsan (known as Sosan in Japan). Written in the 6th century, it is considered the first clear and comprehensive statement of Zen.

The title is often translated as "Faith in Mind", but John McRae argues that the title should be translated as "Inscription on Relying on the Mind" or "Inscription of the Perfect Mind." I chose the call this "Verses on the Perfect Mind."

The Hsin Hsin Ming has been much beloved by Zen practitioners for over a thousand years. It is still studied today in Western Zen circles. I find it is as relevant today as it was then.



The Hsin-Hsin Ming

The Great Way is not difficult,
for those who have no preferences.
Let go of longing and aversion,
and it reveals itself.

Make the smallest distinction, however,
and you are as far from it as heaven is from earth.
If you want to realize the truth,
then hold no opinions for or against anything.

Like and dislike
is the disease of the mind.
When the deep meaning (of the Way) is not understood
the intrinsic peace of mind is disturbed.

As vast as infinite space,
it is perfect and lacks nothing.
Indeed, it is due to your grasping and repelling
That you do not see things as they are.

Do not get entangled in things;
Do not get lost in emptiness.
Be still in the oneness of things
and dualism vanishes by itself.

When you try to stop motion to achieve quietude,
the very effort fills you with activity.
As long as you hold on to opposites
you will never know the One Way.

Those who do not understand the Way
will assert or deny the reality of things.
Deny the reality of things, you miss its deeper reality;
Assert the reality of things, you miss the emptiness of all things.

The more you think about it,
the further you are from the truth.
Cease all thinking,
and there is nothing that will not be revealed to you.

To return to the root is to find the essence,
but to pursue appearances is to miss the Source.
The moment you are enlightened,
you go beyond appearances and emptiness.

Changes that seem to occur in the (empty) world,
appear real only because of ignorance.
Do not search for the truth;
only cease to cherish opinions.

Do not hold to dualistic views,
avoid such habits carefully.
If there is even a trace of right and wrong,
the mind is lost in confusion.

Although all dualities arise from the One,
do not cling even to this One.
When the mind exists undisturbed in the Way,
everything is without fault.

When things can no longer be faulty, it is as if there are no things.
When the mind can no longer be disturbed, it is as if there is no mind.
When thought-objects vanish, the thinking-subject vanishes.
When the mind vanishes, objects vanish.

The arising of other gives rise to self;
giving rise to self generates other.
Know these seeming two facets
as one Emptiness.

In this Emptiness, the two are indistinguishable
and each contains in itself the whole.
When no discrimination is made between this and that,
how can you prefer one to another?

The Great Way is all-embracing,
not easy, not difficult.
Those who rely on limited views are fearful and irresolute;
the faster they hurry, the slower they go.

Clinging, they go too far,
even an attachment to enlightenment is to go astray.
Just let things be in their own way as they are,
and there is neither coming nor going.

Be in harmony with the Way
and you will be free of disturbances.
Tied by your thoughts, you lose the truth,
become heavy, dull, and unwell.

Not well, the mind is troubled.
Then why cling to or reject anything?
If you wish to move in the One Way,
do not dislike even the world of senses and ideas.

Indeed, to accept them fully
is identical with true Enlightenment.
The wise attaches to no goals,
but the foolish fetter themselves.

There is but one Dharma, not many.
Distinctions arise from the clinging needs of the ignorant.
Using mind to stir up the mind
is the original mistake.

Peaceful and troubled derive from thinking;
Enlightenment has no likes or dislikes.
All dualities come from
ignorant inference.

They are like unto dreams or flowers in the air,
the foolish try to grasp them.
Gain and loss, right and wrong,
abandon all such thoughts at once.

If the eye never sleeps,
all dreams will naturally cease.
If the mind makes no discriminations,
all things are as they are, of One-essence.

To understand the mystery of this One-essence
is to be released from all entanglements.
When all things are seen without differentiation,
you return to the origin and remain what you are.

Consider the movement in stillness and the stationary in motion,
both movement and rest disappear.
When such dualities cease to exist
even Oneness itself cannot exist.

This ultimate state
is not bound by rules and descriptions.
For the Realized mind, at one with the Way,
all doing ceases.

Doubts and irresolutions vanish
and the Truth is confirmed in you.
With a single stroke you are freed from bondage;
nothing clings to you and you hold onto nothing.

All is void, clear, and self-illuminating,
with no need to exert the mind.
Here thinking, feeling, knowledge, and imagination
are of no value.

In this world of “as it really is”
there is neither self nor other.
To swiftly accord with that,
only express nonduality.

In this nonduality nothing is separate,
nothing is excluded.
The enlightened of all times and places
have personally realized this truth.

The Truth is beyond time and space,
one instant is eternity.
Not here, not there-
but everywhere always right before your eyes.

Infinitely large and infinitely small,
no difference, for definitions have vanished
and no boundaries can be discerned.
So too with “existence” and “non-existence.”

Don’t waste time in arguments and discussion,
attempting to grasp the ungraspable.
One thing and everything
move among and intermingle without distinction.

To live in this Realization
is to not worry about perfection or non-perfection.
To put your trust in the Way is to live without separation,
and in this nonduality you are one with the Way.

Words! Words!

The Way is beyond language,

Words never could, can not now, and never will describe the Way.



About Eric Putkonen



A modern-day mystic and yogi focused on the “Direct Path” traditions (a.k.a. Pathless Path): *Jnana Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, Zen Buddhism, etc.* After searching for thirteen years and awakening in 2005, he has made himself available to whomever wished to speak with him.

He is also the host and producer of ‘Out of Our Minds’, a bi-weekly 15-minute spirituality podcast focused on nonduality.

Other works by Eric, episodes of Out of Our Minds, and his satsang schedule are available on his website at http://www.awaken2life.org.

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